

Deepavalee 2020



Celebrated on *amavasyā*, the moonless night of the lunar month of Kartik (October-November) Deepavalee (Dīvalī) is a prominent festival, illuminating various aspects of human life.

Social aspects. Days before Dīvalī, it is customary to thoroughly tidy up and decorate homes, courtyards, working areas, and temples, and declutter storerooms. At nightfall, earthen lamps (*deep*) are lit in rows (*āvalee*) dispelling the physical darkness. People wear new dresses, share sweets and gifts as part of social and cultural bonding. It is a festival full of charm, colors and flavors.

Rituals. Since time immemorial, the Vedic era, Dīvalī has been moments of “thanksgiving”; a strong autumn harvest time (*Nava-sasyeshti*) tradition among farmers to pay gratitude to the bounteous nature. This festival gradually filtered down different cultures worldwide during which relatives and friends share meals to rewire relationships.

The underlying science in rituals. Special Yajnas are performed with various types of *Samidhā* (wood sticks) and *Samagī* (mix of medicinal, fragrant, sweet & nutritious herbs) to promote wellness, boost immunity, and ward off bacteria and viruses during the transition of seasons.

Holistic approach: material & spiritual treasures for a glowing life. We need to be thankful for the material and spiritual treasures; material prosperity sustains life and spirituality empowers us to be ethical throughout. *Dharma*, the *Universal Vedic Living values*, is firmly grounded on the Vedas, the one-and-only Revelation to mankind at the creation of the human form of life. Maharshi Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), the great social reformer. Swami ji had left the mortal frame at dusk on the day of Dīvalī unto *nirvana*. His legacy, the Arya Samaj stands as the tower to connect us to spirituality as spiritual reality in daily life.

Understanding prayers

Taj-japas-tad-artha-bhāvanam (Y.D 1.28). Maharishi Patanjali emphasizes on the need to contemplate on the meaning of the mantras during *jāpa* (repeated chanting) and prayers. Even a basic understanding will enable us to (i) cross the obstacles and relate to the inner consciousness; (ii) align ourselves with the divine guidance (the inner voice within us); (iii) put up optimum physical and mental efforts towards realizing our truthful goals and prayers, (iv) be one in thoughts, words and deeds; and (v) be humane at all times.

The Gayatri mantra, chanted during Vedic (Hindu) prayers, is the first step to enlighten our life. In the prayer part “...*Dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt*” we seek the grace of the Eeshvar (God), the

Divinity within us, all around us and present everywhere at-all-times to inspire our mind/intellect towards righteous thoughts and actions. The enlightened intellect is the faculty to distinguish between truth (*satya*) and untruth (*asatya*), virtue (*dharma*) and evil (*adharma*), and thus be forceful in our duties (*kartavya*) and shun negligence (*akartavya*).

...*Ā roha tamaso jyoti* (A.V. 8.1.8) is an invocation “to brighten life by moving out of the mesh hodgepodge of darkness”. ...*Tamaso mā jyotirgamaya*... (B.U 1.3.28) is a well-known prayer “to move out of darkness unto light”.

Realizing the self as the inner consciousness (*ātma*) that can remain uninfluenced by the distractions of the mind, we shall overcome the obstacles to understand “*tamas*” and “*jyoti*” beyond the limitations of physical darkness and light. The physical world is an infinite source of knowledge. Every cloud has a silver lining, indicating that the sun consistently pierces the darkest of clouds to shine bright. Likewise light of knowledge will always overcome the darkness of ignorance.

Jyoti as the physical light. Eeshvar created the sun and other luminous bodies (dyau) to illuminate the universe, thus enable us to acquire knowledge from our surroundings.

Jyoti as the light of knowledge. In that same vein, he gave the Vedas to mankind as the manual to tread on the path of *purushārtha chatusthaya* (1) *dharma* – righteous living; (2) *artha* – righteous earnings; (3) *kāma*, righteous enjoyment - fulfil truthful physical and mental desires; and (4) moksha, *mukti* – liberation from miseries, breaking off the cycle of birth and death to be in the eternal and immaculate bliss of Eeshvar.

The way forward for he/she who is not a scholar of the Vedas or Smritis.

The Vedic seers show the way forward to brighten life: “*Shrutih Smritih Sadāchārah Svasya Cha Priyam-ātmanah, Etach-chaturvidham Prahuh Sākshād-dharmasya Lakshanam*”.

Elaborating on Education (chapter 3 of his masterpiece, the Satyārtha Prakāsh) Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati quotes the latter shloka from Manusmriti to sustain the fact that dharma is known from the following methods: (1) *Shruti* – Vedas; (2) *Smriti* - ancillary Vedic literature by rishis ...Smritis, Darshan Shastras, Upanishads; (3) *Sadāchāra, Satya-ācharan* - exemplary righteous conduct of truthful learned persons, and (4) *Svasya Cha Priyamātmanah*, the gutfeel or guidance of the soul which leads to ‘one should do unto others what he/she would like others to do unto him/her’.

Eeshvar has given all individuals the master key to move out untruth to truth - *Asato Mā Sadgamaya*; move out of the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge - *Tamaso Mā Jyotirgamaya*; and ultimately move out of the cycles of birth and death to immortality - *Mrityur mā'mritam gamaya*.

Lighting a lamp instead of cursing the darkness

The darkness of ignorance (*Avidyā*) is the cradle evils (ego, attachment, hatred, fear of death, lust, anger, etc.) Spirituality is the light that would illumine our mind, body and spirit, as well as character, deeds and innate temperament (*guna*, *karma* & *svabhāva*).

Dīvalī is time brighten life through self-introspection ...know our strengths and weaknesses ...move out of the puddle of mental, moral, spiritual and social darkness ...kindle the light of true knowledge, equanimity, love, compassion ...dispel the darkness of poverty, illiteracy, hatred, social unrest, etc. ...refocus on the quality of social bonding ...channel our resources on compassionate deeds (e.g. gifting a goody of essentials to the needy) instead of spending only 'to be in, to please others, to avoid the unpleasant comments'.

Our efforts '*to be the lamp in our life and our surroundings*' will uplift the physical (material), spiritual (mental & moral) and social realms. The Dīvalī aftermath will be higher levels of inner peace and happiness.



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Happy Dīvalī



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